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DATE 3/10/11  
HB 456



**NARAL**  
**Pro-Choice Montana Foundation**

Good morning Chairman Murphy, members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Alex Corcoran and I represent NARAL Pro-Choice Montana, which is the state's largest grassroots organization dedicated solely to protecting reproductive rights. We represent more than 1200 members and 5000 activists statewide.

We stand today in opposition to House Bill 456.

NARAL Pro-Choice Montana believes in and promotes the full range of reproductive choices— and that includes comprehensive sex education. We are the convening organization of the Montana Partnership for Sex Education, a coalition consisting of 13 local and statewide organizations and dedicated to ensuring access for all Montana youth to medically accurate and comprehensive education regarding sexuality. Our vision is that all youth in Montana have access to accurate information regarding sexuality and are able to make informed decisions regarding sexuality and reproduction throughout their lives.

We all want teenagers to be safe and make responsible decisions about life. We can't be with them all the time, but we can make sure that they have the information they need to make healthy and smart decisions, including decisions about sex.

Comprehensive sex education saves lives and helps prevent unintended teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Approximately 750,000 young women in the United States -almost one in three - become pregnant before they reach age of 20. Research shows that teenagers who receive comprehensive sex education, that includes discussion of contraception, are more likely to delay sexual activity and to use contraceptives when they do become sexually active.

According to 2009 statewide YRBS data, 47.6% of all Montana high school students reported being sexually active; a 2% increase from 2007. Amongst 7th and 8th graders, 16.8% surveyed reported being sexually active. Additionally, at the national level approximately one quarter of all new cases of STDs occur among teenagers. In Montana, 36% of all Chlamydia cases and 29% of all gonorrhea cases occur in youth ages 15 to 19.

Teen pregnancy and STIs among teens are not something that Montana's young people are shielded from-- we need to value Montana's teens enough to give them accurate, life-saving information.

Currently, and as we saw in Helena when this issue came up, school districts can take the steps necessary to implement a sex-education curriculum that best fits the needs of their community while listening to what parents, students and community members have to say. This bill would strip school districts and communities of the ability to decide what's best for their students.

Some proponents might say that the Helena sex-ed debate was an example of no parental involvement, we disagree with that assessment whole-heartedly. The curriculum was drafted over two years by a diverse Curriculum Review Committee which included parents, teachers, local law enforcement and more. When the draft was ready for public comment, the school district held two meetings, hearing nearly 12 hours of public comment, in addition to the

thousands of emails and phone calls that school board members and administrators received. Administrators and school board members took what they heard into consideration and made edits to the documents accordingly. The system that is currently in place works-- it is unnecessary for this body to mandate how one particular curriculum is implemented.

For all of these reasons, we urge a do not pass on HB 456.